

Cleveland/Bolivar County Mississippi

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Cleveland, Mississippi is located in Bolivar County, which borders the Mississippi River in a region known as the Lower Mississippi River Delta. Although Bolivar County is steeped in agrarian history and agriculture continues to be important, the county's nonfarming private sector economy is driven by manufacturing, retail trade and services. One of Cleveland's largest employers is Delta State University. In 1998, there were an estimated 17,526 full-time and part-time employees in the county, with approximately 15 percent in manufacturing, 15 percent in retail and 20 percent in services. The comparison to Mississippi is shown in the following table:

1998

Employees in	Bolivar	Mississippi
Manuf'ing	15%	17%
Retail Trade	15%	16%
Services	20%	24%

In 1997, there were approximately 771 businesses in Bolivar County, with an estimated 30 percent in retail trade, 32 percent in services and 3 percent in manufacturing.

In 1998, the population of Bolivar County was estimated at 40,185 with about 44 percent of the population employed full-time or part-time. In 1998, about 56 percent of the county's population were between the ages of 18 and 64. In 1999, the estimated unemployment rate average was 7.4 percent (5.4 percent in the state). Estimated per

capita income for Bolivar County was \$10,137 in 1988 (\$11,695 for the state) and \$16,499 in 1998 (\$19,776 for the state).

Population has decreased approximately 5 percent between 1988 and 1998. In 1997, the population was estimated to be 36 percent white and 64 percent black. In 1990, educational attainment in Bolivar County, for persons 25 years and over was 55 percent for high school graduates (64 percent for the state) and 15 percent for college graduates (15 percent for the state).

The Mississippi Workshop

Over 30 individuals from Clarksdale, Cleveland, Greenwood and surrounding areas participated in TEAM DelTA's Workshop, held May 23rd in Cleveland, Mississippi. The workshop offered information on how to create more local wealth and higher-paying jobs and about the emerging technology-based economy. Participants provided TEAM DelTA with a better understanding of regional needs, concerns and the kinds of local technology-based economic development currently underway. Participants also completed questionnaires giving their opinions about the usefulness of specified topics and the amount of technology-based economic development strategic planning already taking place in their

communities. Participants had this to say about Mississippi's Delta region:

Strengths and Opportunities

- Import (e.g. tourism) & Export (e.g., culture food, music, art)
- Good natural resources, location, inexpensive power
- Have local quality innovative companies
- Build clusters - life sciences, metal
- Access to community colleges (MDCC, CCC), some good high school programs, responsive universities (MVSU, DSU),
- Have people & can increase skilled-labor pool via training investments

Challenges

- Overcome negative perceptions about Miss., the Delta & the ability/capability of Delta people
- Fear/resistance to change (new processes, products, technology)
- Lack of emerging and/or youth leadership, leader development & work ethics & life skills programs
- Workforce development – (need more people with basic skills & technically capable workforce)
- Soft Infrastructure – more family entertainment, retail, health care
- Locating & keeping educated/trained people
- Lack of access to capital

Participant Response to Questionnaire

At the state regional level, participant responses to the questionnaire indicate that **information about these topics would be most useful:**

- Concept of value-added,
- Role of technology & innovation
- Clusters and networks

- Workforce skills
- Social capital

Participants gave the **lowest topic usefulness ratings to:**

- Globalization, Traded sector(s)
- Participants indicated they knew of very little over-all action planning. Improving K-12 education was the only topic perceived as having high amounts of planning throughout the region. However, some planning was identifying for each community (e.g., incubators, networks, training).

The Community Technology Assessment

TEAM DeLTA held the community technology assessment meeting for the Cleveland community on August 7, 2000. The goals of the assessment were to identify the community's general perspectives and priorities on technology-based economic development and gain a better understanding of the key organizations and structure in the area. Fourteen individuals in formal or informal leadership positions in the community, or who offered key information, participated in the facilitated discussion to identify a potential vision for Cleveland; priorities for technology-based economic development; and, (1) high value-adding companies, (2) suppliers and support businesses, (3) soft infrastructure entities and (4) elements of physical infrastructure in the Cleveland area. Gaps in the four layers were also identified.

Participants wrote a brief description of what they wanted Cleveland to "be good at or known for" – Here's the result:

"to be a growing community with a quality environment for families, good race relations, adequate housing, economic stability for residents, and a proven ability to merge available resources to support industry, manufacturing, technology businesses, hospitality services, educational and research opportunities, and technology application."

Participants were given a hypothetical pot of money for technology-based economic development and asked how they would **prioritize economic development spending over the next year** in the areas of: recruiting outside industry, helping locally-owned existing businesses, starting new locally-owned businesses, workforce development and education, technology transfer and financial investment. **Listed below are participant priorities:**

- Workforce & ed. 46% of \$
- Existing businesses 38% of \$
- Recruiting 35% of \$
- Technology transfer 32% of \$
- New businesses 27% of \$
- Financial investment 22% of \$

When asked if the Internet is changing everything, the consensus was internet influences the "way people communicate and conduct business;" increases global competition, marketing and product access; forces businesses to analyze production, markets, and distribution; and allows greater ability to locate information and participate in educational opportunities. There was concern about the digital divide, "People who don't use it may not know their world is changing...There is probably a significant number without access or ability...While technology can change the amount of knowledge within a community, very little change can take place without financial resources."

To find the existing technology resources and gaps in resources, participants compiled four long lists of (1) Key firms (included were Baxter Health Care, Delta and Pine Land, Bolivar Medical Center, Royal Vendors, Delta State University); (2) Support organizations or businesses, which contribute to the success of key firms by offering supplies, services or other support (included were Bolivar Medical Center, BellSouth,

Mississippi Valley Gas, Entergy, Gaines Petroleum, Mississippi Employment Security Commission); (3) soft infrastructure (included were Mississippi Delta Community College, Delta State University Small Business Development Center, Chamber Team Cleveland, K-12 education; and, (4) hard infrastructure (access to County Port, short line rail service, access to four-lane U.S. highways, about an hour's drive from an U.S. Interstate, has a small airstrip, some CIT fiber lines, a state park). Note: a few critical organizations fell into several lists.

Participants were asked to estimate the perceived involvement (connectivity) among the organizations identified above. Their responses indicate the **community resources perceived to be the most interconnected are** the educational entities, Bolivar County Chamber of Commerce Team Cleveland, telephone & utilities, health care providers and MESC. This group could provide the core for more detailed planning and implementation to achieve a community technology strategy and for pulling the community together to implement action.

Resource gaps or needed improvements include: an adequate east/west route, a high-speed cost-effective CIT infrastructure; flexible day care facilities; youth programs & facilities; family entertainment, recreation facilities & cultural events; comprehensive approach to workforce development, more program coordination, a state-of-the-art facility; housing & retail; temp. staff service.

Possible Next Steps

- Form a detailed Community Technology Plan (including CIT infrastructure, aggregate demand strategies, training needs/facility);
- Explore/pursue building clusters & networks, accessing capital;
- Explore potential business or other opportunities to fill resource gaps;
- Form area alliances and work to inform and raise awareness about technology, seize identified opportunities & reduce gaps.

